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By-Kitzhaber, Albert R.

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In a discussion of the problems involved in preparing for the first National Defense Education Act, Title 11-funded summer institutes for teachers of English, this article emphasizes difficulties that possibly might be encountered by the profession in directing and teaching effectively these training seminars for the first time. Recommendations include--(1) the responsibility to instruct all levels of English, (2) college-school cooperation, (3) the study of both language and rhetoric, and (4) the establishment of practical criteria for professional advancement. Also commented on are elementary and secondary school teacher preparation and the need for closer cooperation between the Modern Language Association and the National Council of Teachers of English. (AF)

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:OLLEGE ENGLISH

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Reform in English

ALBERT R. KITZHABER

IT SEEMS TO ME that this is an extraordinarily interesting—even an exciting—time to be a teacher of English. In the 25 years I have been in the profession, I have never felt more pleased with the way things are going or more confident that we now have the opportunity to make them go a great deal better still. I do not of course mean to suggest that I am unaware of the many problems that do indeed beset us—under-prepared teachers, confused and often antiquated courses of study, large classes and small salaries, and all the rest. These problems will never disappear entirely, and we would be foolish to expect them to. But great changes are at hand, and it is the certainty of this fact that underlies my optimism. Let me spell out in a little more detail what I mean.

We have seen in the last decade a major shift in the educational philosophy that undergirds the school curriculum, a movement that has been marked by a sharply increased emphasis on the intellectual validity of school subjects, no matter what level they are taught at; a movement that has modernized the concepts and data of school subjects and brought them into harmony with current scholarship, while at the same time taking advantage of new discoveries in learning-theory that make instruction more effective. University scholars and school teachers have pooled their knowledge and experience in a close and friendly collaboration that has no precedent in the history of American education, and the brilliant results of this collaboration are helping already to provide your children and mine with a vastly better education in mathematics, science, and foreign language.

Only in the last three or four years has the reform movement begun to affect English. But now, with more than a dozen major curriculum projects at work around the country, supported in large part by the United States Office of Education, several exciting new courses in English are beginning to emerge.

Perhaps the most serious limitation still blocking widespread improvement of the English curriculum is that so few teachers in the profession have an adequate background for teaching new courses of study. I am referring not only to the melancholy fact that half of the people teaching English in secondary school lack an English major, or to the recent disclosure that, although elementary school teachers spend nearly half their classtime teaching English, only ten percent of them have majored in it and, on the average, only eight percent of their undergraduate course work has been in English. But I am referring also to the fact that many if not most of those who do have an English major find themselves inadequately prepared to teach language, reading, composition, and speech—and sometimes even to teach literature with the confidence and expertness we should expect of professional people.

The leaders of the reform movement in school mathematics, science, and foreign language were faced with the same problem at the outset. But, thanks to prompt and continued help from the

Mr. Kitzhaber, past president of NCTE and professor of English at the University of Oregon, presented this address at the 54th annual convention in Cleveland November 26, 1964.

National Science Foundation and the National Defense Education Act, they have been able to retrain a substantial proportion of the teachers of these subjects in summer and academic-year institutes, so that now the reforms have made great headway in the nation's schools.

We in English protested vigorously when English was excluded from the National Defense Education Act of 1958. The subject to which we have given our lives, the subject that underlies instruction in all other subjects, had in effect been labeled a frill by Congress, something of no importance to national well-being. And though we were heartened when Project English made its first modest and tentative efforts to encourage fundamental reforms in the teaching of English, we wondered how the work of the Curriculum Study Centers could have any but merely local effects so long as there was no national program to update the professional training of English teachers.

Repeatedly, leaders of the Council and of the Modern Language Association testified before Congressional committees about the plight of English teaching and English teachers and urged the need for massive federal help. But it was not until this year, and then only after an extraordinarily hard fight, that we carried the point. Now, as you know, English as well as other humanistic subjects has been included in two titles of the amended National Defense Education Act. The one I wish to talk about this evening is Title XI, which provides for English institutes for elementary and secondary school teachers, to be offered at colleges and universities beginning next summer.

It is a great victory for the profession, and we in NCTE can take pride in the influential role that the Council has played in helping to secure passage of this important legislation. We now have a priceless opportunity not only to develop new courses of study in English, better than any that have preceded them, but also to prepare teachers to teach them and so get them into the classrooms of the nation where they can serve the purpose for which they are intended: the better education of American children.

Now let me change rather sharply the direction of my remarks. We will have English institutes this year—perhaps a hundred or more—and we will have them for at least another three years under the present law. Good. But I must ask a pointed question: *Are we ready for them?* Or, to put it another way, now that we have been stricken with unaccustomed prosperity, can we survive it with honor? Will we know what to do with institutes, now that money is available to establish them? Can we see to it that they are run intelligently and responsibly so they will accomplish the aims set for them? In a very real sense, I believe that the English teaching profession will be on trial this coming summer before the educational community and before the nation. If we use this money wisely and justify the trust that has been placed in us to improve the teaching of our subject, we can look forward to a continued collaboration with the federal government from which enormous benefits for our pupils can be derived. If we use the money foolishly and irresponsibly, thus lending substance to the objections raised by some members of Congress to the inclusion of English in the amended National Defense Education Act, we shall discredit our profession and set back by a decade or more our efforts to improve the teaching of English.

Is there any danger that the second of these possibilities may come to pass? I am sorry to say that indeed I think there is. The danger is real and it is near at hand; but I hope that if we are fully conscious of it we will be able to avoid it. Let me try to analyze the problem for you as I see it.

It is fair to point out that part of the danger stems from circumstances that we did not create, though we must accommodate our plans to them. I am thinking especially of the frantic haste with which prospective directors of institutes this first year must draw up their proposals, secure their staffs; send out announcements and application forms, screen candidates, and finally set up in business. This first year, because the Act was not signed into law until October 16, we shall be running three or four months behind the normal schedule that the foreign language institutes follow. Haste is certain to make some waste, but we shall have to do the best we can; this particular problem should not arise again.

Another part of the danger results from the novelty of the undertaking: very few elementary and secondary school teachers of English have attended institutes before, and few college and university English departments have offered them. A certain amount of confusion this first year is inevitable simply because of inexperience. But we are much better off than our colleagues in history, say, or geography, who will also offer institutes this summer, for we do have some precedents to follow. A number of English institutes have been held independently in various parts of the country during the last five years. And we enjoy the enormous advantage of having available as one important kind of model the pioneering work of the College Entrance Examination Board's Commission on English, which sponsored 20 institutes on as many campuses in the summer of 1962. The Modern Language Association, with commendable foresight and initiative, has collected all pertinent information about these institutes and is sending it to chairmen of college and university English departments throughout the country.

The most critical source of difficulties this coming summer, however, is, as you might expect, not circumstances but people—in part those who will enroll in the institutes, but mainly those who will teach in them. Let me say a few words first about the enrollees. There is little doubt that, during this initial year, we will find a heavy preponderance of serious-minded, interested, and able school teachers in the institutes. But as one who has directed English institutes for a number of years, I should like to offer next summer's institute participants a few bits of well-meant advice.

First, all teachers enrolling in an institute should expect to work, and in fact to work pretty hard. I do not mean that they should all resign themselves to the prospect of suffering a total collapse at the end of the session; the institute program does not include funds for either hospitalization or psychotherapy. But they should recognize clearly that a well-run institute will provide a vigorous intellectual workout. Though the level of study in institutes will ordinarily not be exactly equivalent to that of regular graduate courses in English, still the work will be of an advanced nature—as advanced as the background and ability of the participants will allow—and it will be intensive.

Second, the teachers should demonstrate a mature sense of professional responsibility in the way they approach their summer's study. Most institutes will probably offer graduate credit of some kind if the participant wants it but will also permit attendance without credit. If for reasons of his own a participant elects the latter option, he should not slack off on his study just because no grade is being entered on his transcript. Institutes will succeed in their purpose only to the extent that vigorous intellectual activity is maintained in them. And if a teacher in an institute elects to take the course for credit, then gets perhaps a plain *C* rather than a gaudy *A*, I hope that he will accept the grade with stoic

fortitude and not write an impassioned letter to his Congressman alleging subversion, incompetence, and personal rancor among the faculty. I would like him to behave, in short, with the same restraint that he would like the parents of his own students to show in similar crises.

Third, the intellectual activity that attendance at an institute should promote ought not cease the moment the institute ends. Rather, the experience of attending an institute should serve as a catalyst for the teacher's continuing intellectual development. The institute should introduce the teacher to new ideas, new fields of knowledge, which he will continue to explore independently after he is back in his own classroom. If this does not happen, much of the value of the institute experience will be lost. But if the summer's study is successful, the person's teaching should be more informed, his perspective broader, his tolerance toward new ideas greater, the intellectual tone of his class livelier.

So much for the frailties, actual or potential, of the institutes' customers. But these good people are not the ones that really worry me. The ones that make me most apprehensive for the success of the institutes are my fellow English professors who are going to have to organize the institutes and teach in them. And now I propose to indulge myself by exhorting my colleagues. I shall probably never again have so fair a chance, and I am determined not to let it slip past me.

As a member of half a dozen college and university English departments in the last 25 years, I have become conscious of what I now call the college English department syndrome. It is based, I admit, on a set of stereotypes, and we might have trouble finding any one individual or department that neatly fits the pattern. At the same time, every stereotype has at least some basis in fact, else it would not have arisen. And though there are plenty of able and sensible and open-minded people teaching English in college, there are enough of another kind to create the stereotype and especially to lend a curious tone to many English department staff meetings. As I have sat through these meetings over the past quarter-century, the characteristics of the syndrome have been brought home to me—the endless nit-picking, the deep distrust of new ideas outside one's own narrow specialty, the sweeping and indiscriminate contempt for outgroups such as linguists and professors of Education, the serene obliviousness to all the problems of education below the college level, and above all the unshakable conviction of virtue. I have often thought that if this is what a lifelong association with humane letters really leads to, we had better hedge the claims we make to our students for the study of literature. Perhaps these tendencies are due simply to the natural infirmities of intellectuals; but it does appear that English departments and English professors are curiously prone to this kind of behavior and attitudes.

I would not make so much of this if I were not convinced that it is precisely this behavior and these attitudes that are going to prove the chief stumbling-block to the success of the English institutes, and they therefore merit our closest attention and concern.

As William Riley Parker said a year ago, money alone is not enough to insure the success of such an enterprise as a nationwide program of institutes. There must be, among the leaders of the profession, an informed awareness of the conditions that the institutes are intended to improve, a readiness to accept the responsibility for undertaking change, and a firm determination to act—even if action carries with it the clear implication that one's own house has not been kept in perfect order. But between the situation in foreign language teaching at the time institutes were first begun, and the

present situation in English teaching, Professor Parker noted a significant difference. "The single most important fact," he remarked, "about the current Renaissance in foreign language teaching is that it was accompanied by a Reformation. I doubt very much," he went on, "that many English teachers have any conviction of sin." And this is the very point I want to make. Though I do not share Professor Parker's pessimism about the likelihood of genuine reforms in the English curriculum and major improvements in the teaching of it, I think I have not mistaken the nature of the problem or underestimated the difficulty of dealing with it. And since the problem appears to be a moral one, perhaps exhortation is really what is called for.

It is quite true that there is no perceptible "conviction of sin" among the great majority of college English professors. Although a few distinguished scholars like Wayne Booth and Northrop Frye are taking an active interest in the way in which English is taught in school as well as in college, these men still are lonely exceptions. So my first exhortation is simply a call for what I suppose might be termed a moral awakening on the part of college English teachers. I am not so naive as to expect that such an awakening could affect even a bare majority of those teaching English in colleges and universities. But if a substantial fraction of the most able people would become actively interested in efforts to improve the teaching of their subject at all levels, the profession could do what needs to be done. A conviction of sin is probably the first step. That is, college English teachers should recognize their dereliction in having ignored for so long the obvious fact that the teaching of English at any level of education is an inescapable part of their responsibility. The kind of education in English that can be offered successfully in college is inevitably tied to the kind of education in English that has been given before the student reaches college. So I would hope that college English departments, even if only in their own self-interest, would resolve to assume responsibility for the teaching of a balanced English program at all levels of instruction. I emphasize balance because it will not do to improve only the literature curriculum, which is all that most English professors would be inclined to take notice of, and to ignore instruction in the skills of English and in the English language.

Second, I should like to impress upon college English teachers how necessary it is that they learn to cooperate, voluntarily and without condescension, with their colleagues in the schools. The kind of effort needed to work the necessary improvements in the teaching of English is one that cannot realistically be assigned to school teachers alone or to college teachers alone. It is the scholars from the colleges and universities who are most likely to be in touch with current thinking in their subject and to have a comprehensive knowledge of it; their ideas are necessary both to establish goals and to serve as a catalyst to action. But the university scholar is emphatically not an expert on the problems of presenting his subject to children of pre-college age. Here the experienced school teacher is the undisputed expert. Both must work harmoniously together if the job is to be done as well as it deserves to be done, or even indeed if it is to be done at all.

Third, it seems to me that, if the institutes are to prosper, a great many literary scholars in the college and university English departments must change their attitude toward the study of language. The great majority of English institutes must face the necessity of providing intellectually respectable work in English grammar, yet as one distinguished language scholar has wryly observed, "linguistics" is a dirty word to many college English professors. They do not under-

stand modern language study, they obviously regard it as a threat to their security and peace of mind, and—quite illogically for highly educated people—they do not want to learn anything about it—though none of these circumstances appears to inhibit them from dogmatizing about it. One need not regard linguistics as a panacea or proselytize for it in order to recognize that modern linguistic science is a fact of life, and that it will not go away if we try to belittle it or make fun of it or close our eyes to it. While the exact bearing of linguistic science on rhetoric and on literary analysis is still unclear, there can be no doubt that such relations do exist and will be identified. And it seems equally clear that in the years ahead English scholars, no matter what their specialization, are going to have to know something about linguistic science—just as a modern biologist finds himself obliged to learn a good deal about chemistry, physics, and higher mathematics. One of the noteworthy intellectual tendencies of our time is the growing awareness of cross-relations among disciplines once thought separate. English is certainly no exception, as the New Criticism has already shown.

Fourth, I would like to urge that college English departments become more conscious of the importance of rhetoric, an academic discipline with a history as long as that of organized education itself. At the present time rhetoric in most English departments is regarded solely as the concern of the freshman English staff, and only youthful novices and elderly drudges need concern themselves with the teaching of it. But it is plain that most of the institutes must provide for intelligent instruction in the teaching of English composition, which means some kind of systematic course in rhetorical theory and practice. There are signs now of a widespread awakening of interest in rhetoric, but they are still only signs. We need urgently to have more scholars turn their attention to rhetorical theory, so that in the next decade we can bring our knowledge of this discipline abreast of our knowledge of literary criticism and linguistic analysis.

Finally, let me express my conviction that the college English teaching profession must soon look closely and honestly at its criteria for professional advancement. Please do not misunderstand me. I hope I am not taking an anti-intellectual attitude or opposing scholarly research and publication in and of themselves. A teacher who does no research at all, who never tries to discover new things about his subject first hand, who shrinks from having the quality of his thinking exposed to the judgment of his peers, is intellectually lazy and professionally irresponsible. On the other hand, the college English teaching profession needs to recognize that a lot of what can only be called magic and incantation, in the anthropological sense, now characterizes the whole question of research and publication. The college English teacher who has published something in a scholarly—or even halfway scholarly—journal, no matter how dull or unintelligible or ill-written his article may sometimes be, advances his professional career thereby. And often he finds it virtually impossible to advance his career in any other fashion. We all know this is true, though most of us do not like to admit it or even think about it. Of course the profession should recognize worthwhile research and publication as criteria for advancement. But it should recognize other legitimate activities as well—among them, the kind of cooperative efforts I have been advocating. It will be extremely difficult to engage able members of college English departments to do this sort of work, even when they are otherwise willing, unless some assurance can be offered them that such activity will enhance their professional standing and be used as

legitimate grounds for advancement in rank and salary.

Now, having taken pains to ingratiate myself with both school and college teachers, I will conclude with a few observations related in a general way to what I have been saying, but leading to a specific proposal. It concerns the Council and its present and future relations with another professional organization that enrolls large numbers of teachers of English, the Modern Language Association. For I am convinced that the NDEA institutes, and other large-scale undertakings important to the entire profession, can be greatly aided by the right kind of relations between these two organizations, and just as greatly hindered by the wrong kind.

Certainly one of the best things for the profession that has happened in the last several years has been the increasing degree of cooperation between NCTE and MLA. The cooperation has been marked, it is true, by a certain skittishness on both sides, by a kind of wary mutual respect, as well as by occasional misgivings as to what the other is really up to. But relations do exist, and they have already made possible a number of important joint undertakings.

This growing cooperation has been the natural outcome of certain changes that have occurred within the two organizations during the last few years. The Modern Language Association, for many years holding itself aloof from the sweaty problems of the schools and devoting its attention wholly to scholarship, has become increasingly concerned with the way English is taught in the years before college, and with the encouragement of applied research in the teaching of English. The National Council of Teachers of English, which college English teachers once thought of as an organization given over entirely to problems of English teaching in the schools and dominated by an unholy alliance of professors of Education and structural linguists, has developed an ever more vigorous and effective College Section that overlaps some of the interests of the MLA.

Let me say at once that I think both of these developments are a source of great satisfaction to anyone who has the good of the English teaching profession at heart, and the welfare of the young people whom we teach. And I think it fair to say also that we are chiefly indebted for these developments to the wisdom and foresight and leadership of two of the most remarkable and influential men in American education today—John H. Fisher, Executive Secretary of the Modern Language Association, and our own Executive Secretary, Jim Squire.

There are no doubt still a great many members of the MLA who either have never heard of NCTE or who, having heard, still think of it with a disdain they are at no great pains to hide, as a kind of schoolmarms' social club. And there are plenty of NCTE members who either know nothing at all of the MLA, or who suspect enough to regard it with a kind of superstitious dread, something to be dragged clanking out of the cellar to frighten oneself and one's colleagues with. Any proposal to extend the cooperation between the two organizations must take these facts into account; there is a great deal of educating of the membership still to be done in both.

Yet it seems self-evident to me that an ever closer cooperation between MLA and NCTE is in the best interests not only of the organizations themselves but, what is far more important, the best interests of American education. As English is increasingly caught up in the educational reform movement, and as more federal and foundation funds become available for projects to improve the teaching of English in schools and colleges, it will soon be critically important for the English teaching profession to

present a unified front, for MLA and NCTE not to compete but to collaborate. In the years just ahead we will have opportunities to make sweeping improvements in the teaching of English that, as little as five years ago, would have been thought mere hopeful fantasy. Nothing, it seems to me, would be more profitless than a competitive relationship between the two organizations, with the resulting duplication of efforts and divided policies. There is too much at stake for us to allow narrower loyalties or ambitions to get in the way.

To make possible the close collaboration that I am persuaded is called for, let me propose the creation of a joint agency, equally responsive to MLA and NCTE and supported by them on an equitable basis, with offices in Washington. There, such an agency could keep in touch with developments in the federal government that affect our professional concerns; and it could also cooperate effectively with other educational groups such as the American Council on Education and the National Education Association which maintain offices in Washington. When it is appropriate to do so, such an agency could make sure that Congress is in possession of all necessary facts when legislation affecting English is being considered.

This idea is not original with me; it was talked of a couple of years ago, then dropped. I wish to revive it now because of what seems to me the urgent necessity of creating such an agency as soon as possible.

And, to return finally to the problem of institutes, with which I started, I am sure that this joint agency would make it much easier for both MLA and NCTE to help insure a high quality throughout the program; and, by so doing, to serve ultimately the chief purpose for which our organizations exist: the best possible education for young Americans.

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